

FOIA b3b

Balloon Rises Suddenly, And So Do 2 Designers

NASHVILLE, Tenn., June 2 (AP)—Two young balloonists from the University of Minnesota who said they hadn't planned to go up at all found themselves soaring 11,500 feet above Nashville.

Tracy Barnes, 23, former sky-diving paratrooper, said he and his partner, Lee Becker, 21, were demonstrating the balloon to friends at a South Nashville residence yesterday.

"A gust of wind came along and knocked the balloon loose from the rope moorings and suddenly we were going up," he said.

"They weren't unprepared for flight, however."

"We had on parachutes but we didn't have any oxygen and I knew that if we reached 15,000 feet we would have to bail out. I was telling Lee how to use a chute at the same time we were struggling with the valve."

The valve that controls the flow of hot air into the nylon balloon, causing it to rise, wouldn't close. When at 11,500 feet they finally got it turned off, their descent was so rapid they had to turn it on again to slow the drop.

They finally eased their craft, 70 feet tall and 40 feet in diameter, over treetops and barely missing some high-voltage lines, into the back yard of a West Nashville apartment house. The cross-town trip took one hour.

"We weren't frightened," said Mr. Barnes, who boasts of 60 ascents. But an apartment house sunbather was.

"The boys looked calm as everything but I was scared to death," said Mrs. Lionel Engledow. "At first it looked like men from Mars in strange-looking orange suits and a white balloon as large as the house."

It also was an unusual experience for Mr. Barnes and Mr. Becker who operate the equipment, which Mr. Barnes designed, in advertising and promotion stunts.

"We usually fly at 200 to 500 feet just above the treetops," Mr. Barnes said. His partner added:

"It sort of feels like Pied Piper going over the cities, blowing our air horn and waving and stopping traffic."

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